SAVERIO TENUTA

THE MASK OF FUDO

紅雲霧の伝説

BOOK 1: MIST

HUMANOIDS

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HUMANOIDS

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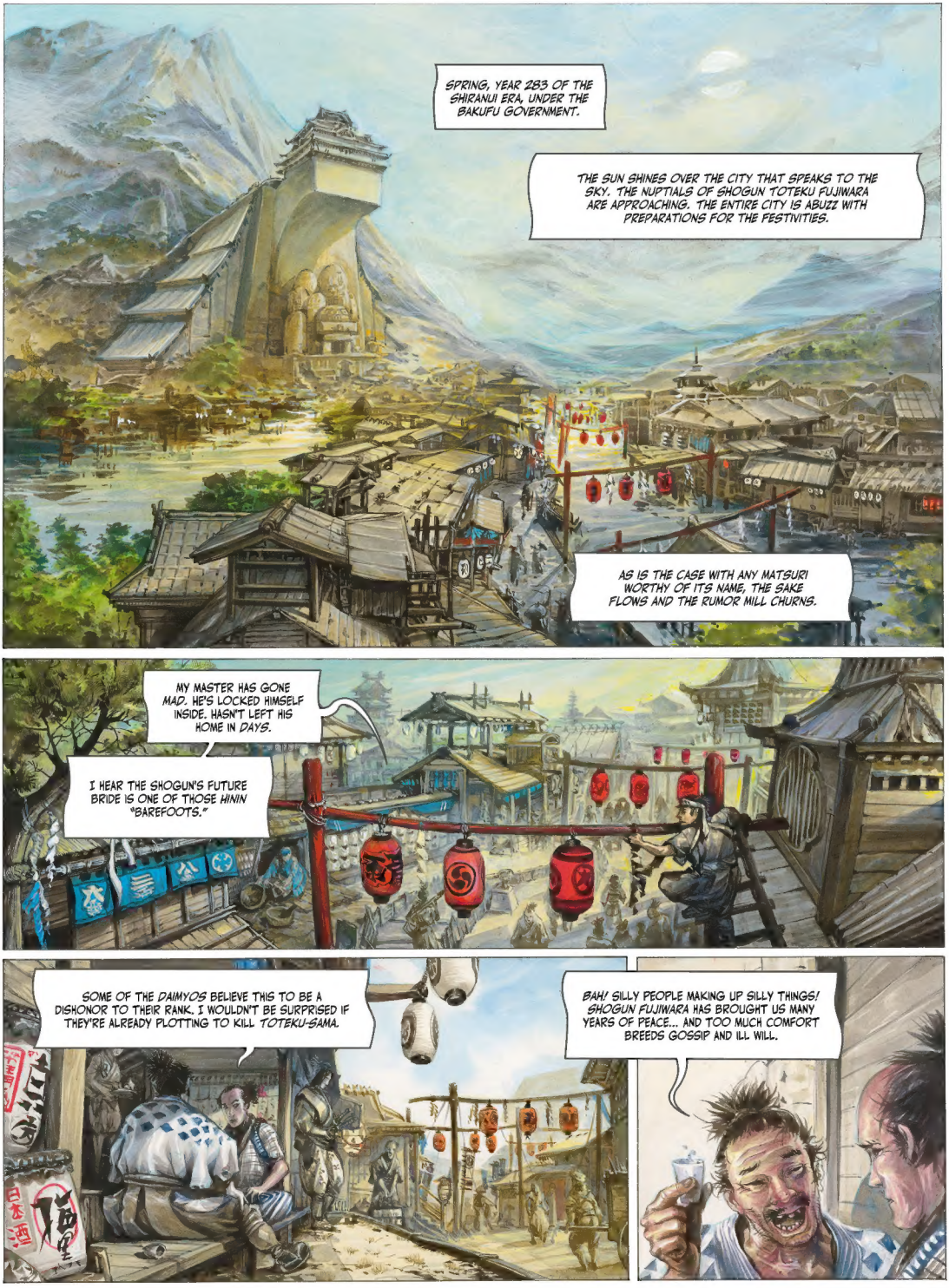

SPRING, YEAR 283 OF THE SHIRANUI ERA, UNDER THE BAKUFU GOVERNMENT.
THE SUN SHINES OVER THE CITY THAT SPEAKS TO THE SKY. THE NUPTIALS OF SHOGUN TOTEKU FUJIWARA ARE APPROACHING. THE ENTIRE CITY IS ABUZZ WITH PREPARATIONS FOR THE FESTIVITIES.
AS IS THE CASE WITH ANY MATSURI WORTHY OF ITS NAME, THE SAKE FLOWS AND THE RUMOR MILL CHURNS.
MY MASTER HAS GONE MAD. HE'S LOCKED HIMSELF INSIDE. HASN'T LEFT HIS HOME IN DAYS.
I HEAR THE SHOGUN'S FUTURE BRIDE IS ONE OF THOSE HININ "BAREFOOTS."
SOME OF THE DAIMYOS BELIEVE THIS TO BE A DISHONOR TO THEIR RANK. I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF THEY'RE ALREADY PLOTTING TO KILL TOTEKU-SAMA.
BAH! SILLY PEOPLE MAKING UP SILLY THINGS! SHOGUN FUJIWARA HAS BROUGHT US MANY YEARS OF PEACE... AND TOO MUCH COMFORT BREEDS GOSSIP AND ILL WILL.

I HOPE SO, BECAUSE I HEAR THERE'S A VICIOUS SHINOBI SLITHERING AMONG THE CROWD...
...READY TO STAB THE SHOGUN IN THE BACK.
KANPAI, OLD FRIEND!
MASKS, GENTLEMEN! MASKS FOR THE MATSURI!
WHO CARES? I SAY, AS LONG AS THEY LEAVE US THE SAKE... KANPAI!
BUY ONE FOR YOUR CHILD! AND FOR YOURSELF, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT!
A NOBLE SAMURAI OR A POWERFUL DEMON... YOU CAN BE WHOEVER YOU WISH BENEATH A MASK!
YOU THERE, SIR! HOW ABOUT A MASK? EXQUISITE CRAFTSMANSHIP! MADE BY THE BEST ARTISANS!
LET YOUR MOST HIDDEN DESIRES GUIDE YOUR CHOICE...

STOP, AKAJITA!
BY ALL THE GODS! I... I DIDN'T REALIZE...

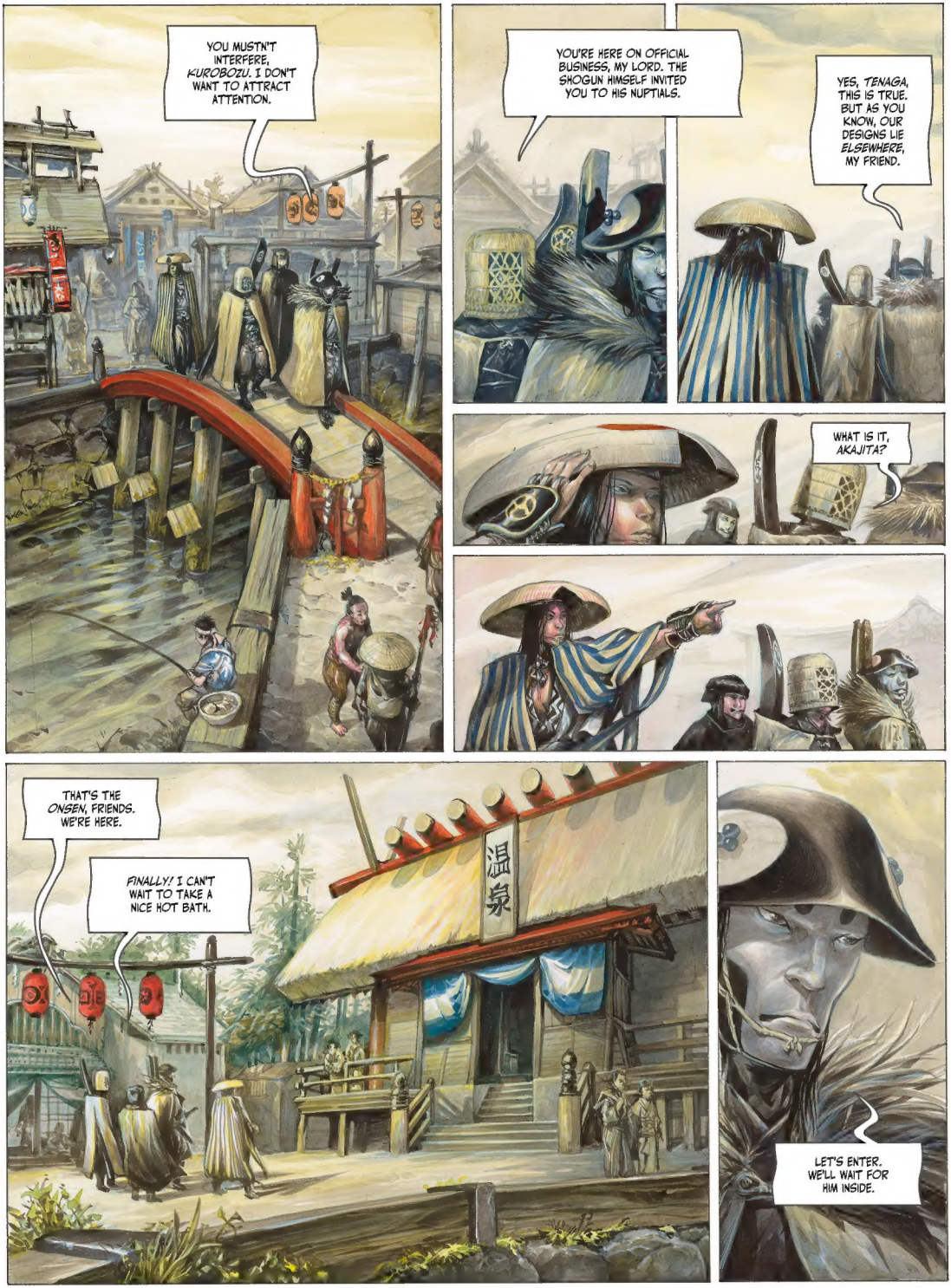
GET OUT OF OUR WAY, OLD MAN. WE DON'T WANT THAT JUNK YOU'RE HAWKING!

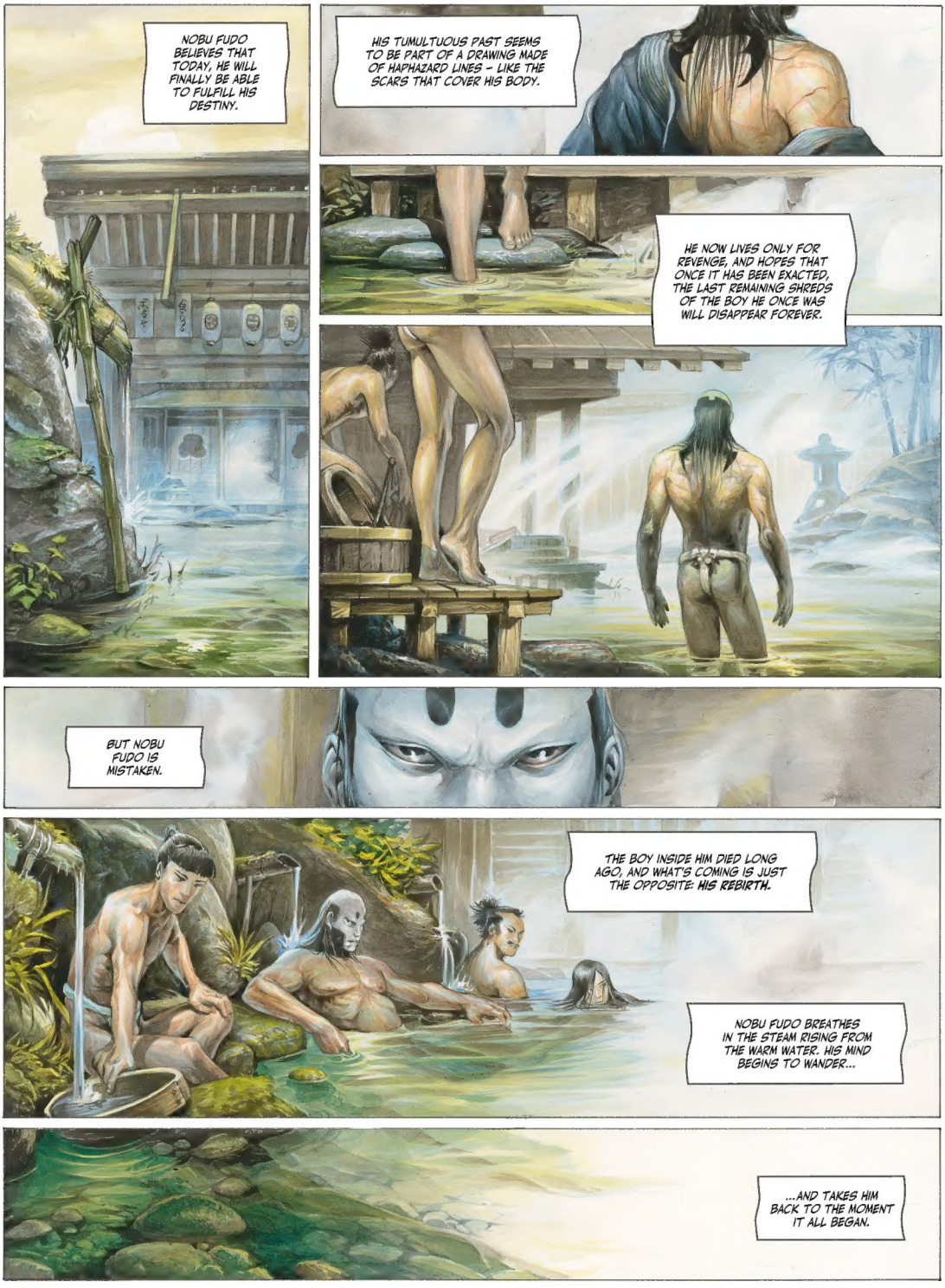
YES... CERTAINLY... PLEASE FORGIVE MY INSOLENCE.

WHAT DID I TELL YOU? YOU ASK ME, THE SHOGUN NEEDS TO WATCH HIS BACK.
WHY? WHO WERE THOSE MEN?

THEY'RE WITH THE DOKUTSU DOJO...A SECT OF WARRIORS KNOWN FOR THEIR CRUELTY.
DID YOU SEE THAT FACE?

MY ADVICE IS TO FORGET YOU EVER SAW THEM. THEIR LEADER'S NAME IS FUDO. SOME PEOPLE SAY HE ISN'T EVEN HUMAN.
PERHAPS HE'S THE SHINOBI I WAS TALKING ABOUT, WHO KNOWS?


YOU MUSTN'T INTERFERE, KUROBOZU. I DON'T WANT TO ATTRACT ATTENTION.
YOU'RE HERE ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS, MY LORD. THE SHOGUN HIMSELF INVITED YOU TO HIS NUPTIALS.
YES, TENAGA, THIS IS TRUE. BUT AS YOU KNOW, OUR DESIGNS LIE ELSEWHERE, MY FRIEND.
WHAT IS IT, AKAJITA?
THAT'S THE ONSEN, FRIENDS. WE'RE HERE.
FINALLY! I CAN'T WAIT TO TAKE A NICE HOT BATH.
温泉
LET'S ENTER. WE'LL WAIT FOR HIM INSIDE.


NOBU FUDO BELIEVES THAT TODAY, HE WILL FINALLY BE ABLE TO FULFILL HIS DESTINY.
HIS TUMULTUOUS PAST SEEMS TO BE PART OF A DRAWING MADE OF HAPHAZARD LINES – LIKE THE SCARS THAT COVER HIS BODY.
HE NOW LIVES ONLY FOR REVENGE, AND HOPES THAT ONCE IT HAS BEEN EXACTED, THE LAST REMAINING SHREDS OF THE BOY HE ONCE WAS WILL DISAPPEAR FOREVER.
BUT NOBU FUDO IS MISTAKEN.
THE BOY INSIDE HIM DIED LONG AGO, AND WHAT'S COMING IS JUST THE OPPOSITE: HIS REBIRTH.
NOBU FUDO BREATHES IN THE STEAM RISING FROM THE WARM WATER. HIS MIND BEGINS TO WANDER...
...AND TAKES HIM BACK TO THE MOMENT IT ALL BEGAN.

CRAAA
CRAAA
CRAAA
TOUF
CRAAA
CRAAA
CRAAA
TOUK
TOUK
TOUK

TOUP

KRAAA!
CRAA!

CRAA!
CRAA!
HEY! LITTLE GIRL!
WHERE ARE YOU RUSHING OFF TO?

MY NAME IS *MOKAI*. I'VE JUST ARRIVED IN THE VILLAGE. I THOUGHT IT RIGHT TO INTRODUCE MYSELF, SO YOU KNOW WHO *RUNS* THESE PARTS NOW.

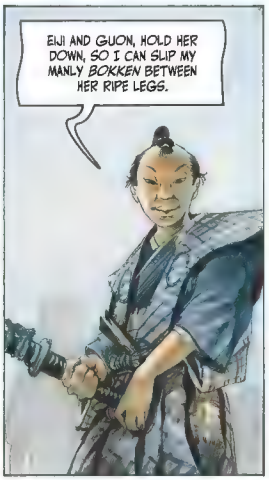
PLEASE, LET ME THROUGH, I BEG YOU.

BUT WHY? YOU'RE IN THE COMPANY OF *GENTLEMEN*. CAN'T YOU TELL?

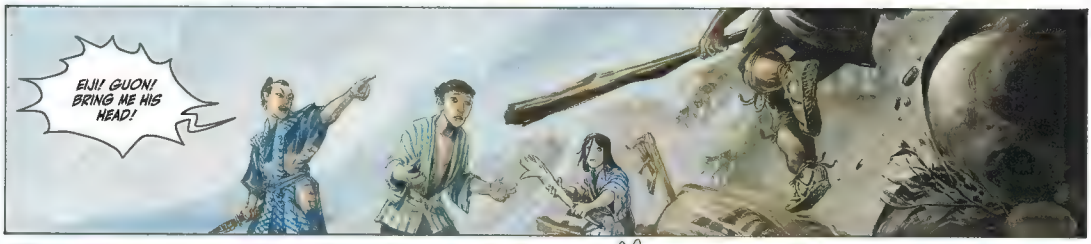
YOU'RE *HININ*, AREN'T YOU? BUT I CAN SEE A CHARMING LITTLE FACE UNDER THAT *FILTH*. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
MI... *MIKIKO*.

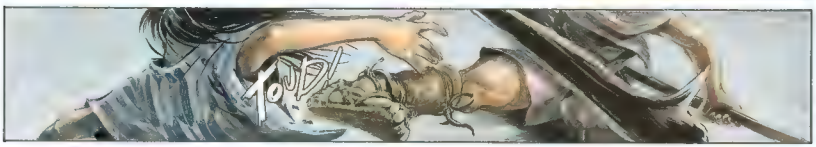
I MUST GET HOME TO MOTHER. SHE'LL HIT ME IF I'M LATE AGAIN.

SHUT UP, YOU LITTLE BITCH!
AH!

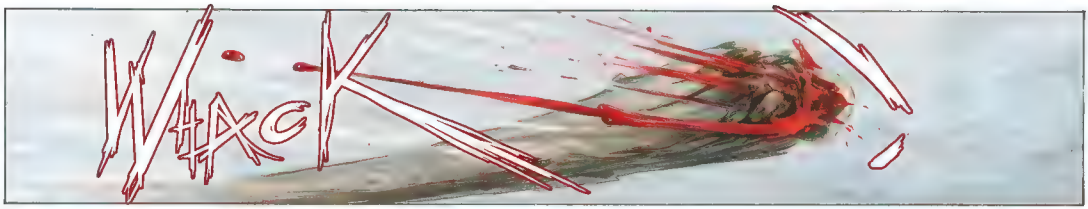

EIJI AND GUON, HOLD HER DOWN, SO I CAN SLIP MY MANLY *BOKKEN* BETWEEN HER RIPE LEGS.

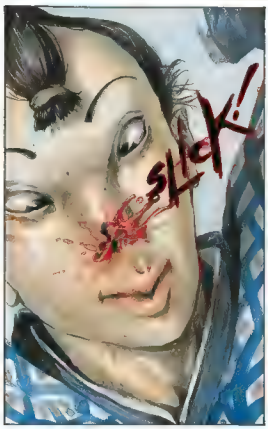
BUT MASTER MOKAI, YOU CAN'T--
QUIET, MORONS! YOU'RE THE SONS OF MY FATHER'S SERVANTS, NOTHING MORE!
I GRANTED YOU THE HONOR OF COMING WITH ME, BUT IF YOU DON'T DO AS I SAY, I'LL TAKE IT OUT ON YOUR PARENTS!
Y... YES, MASTER MOKAI.
AND NOW, I'M GOING TO SHOW YOU WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN.
AAGH!
OW!!
WHO DARES TO INTERRUPT ME?



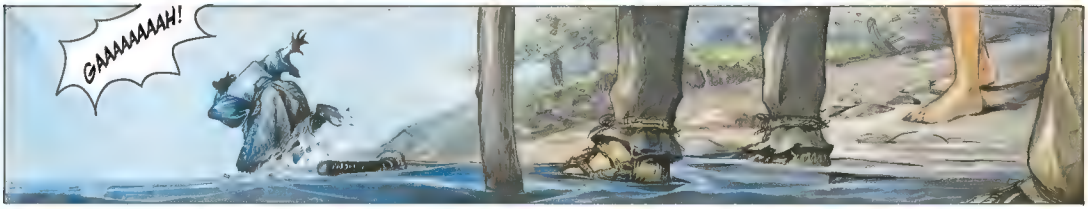


*IN JAPANESE FOLKLORE, A SUPERNATURAL DEMON OR DEVIL.


WHACK!


SLICK!

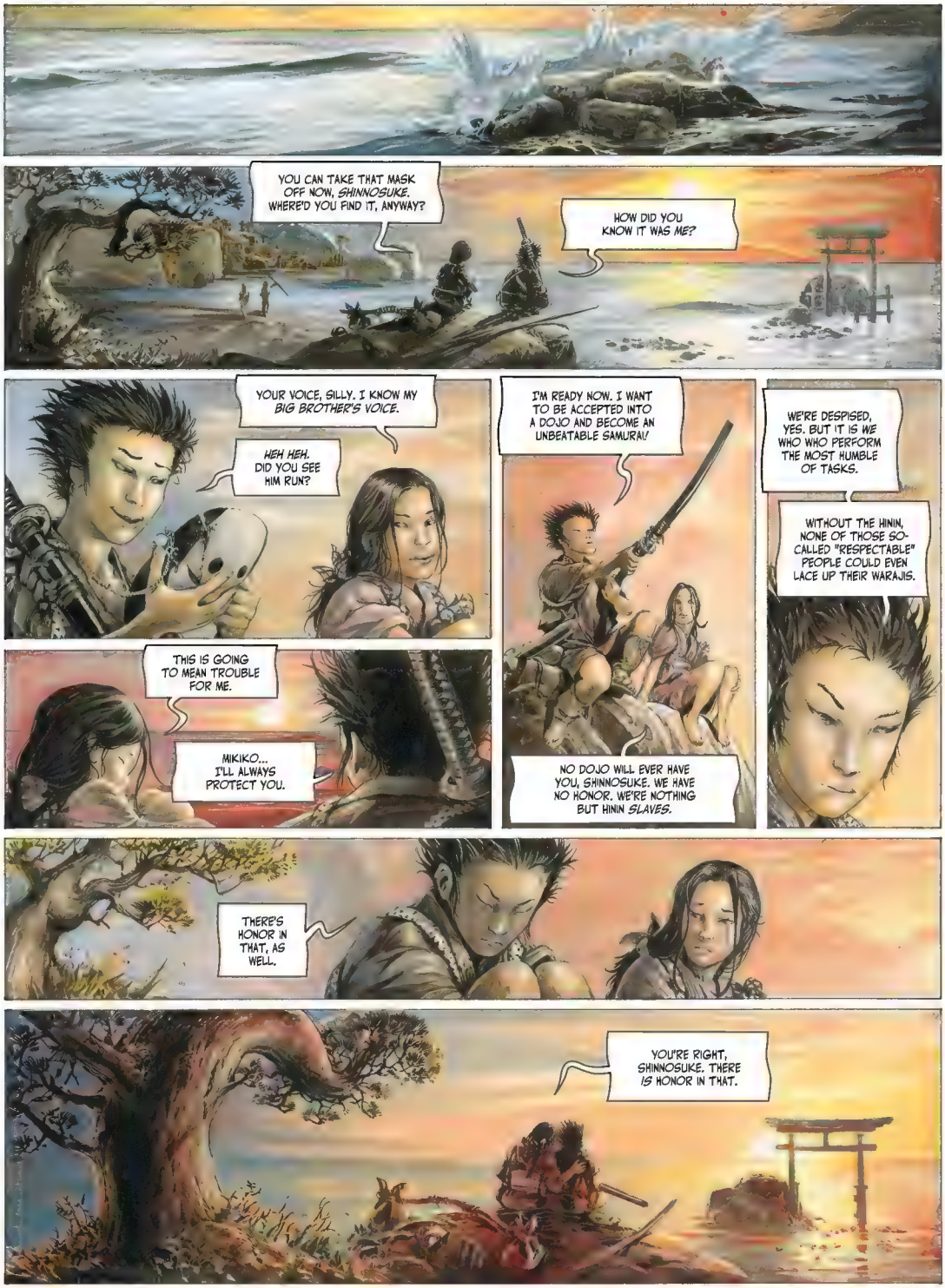
AGH!!


GAAAAAAAAH!

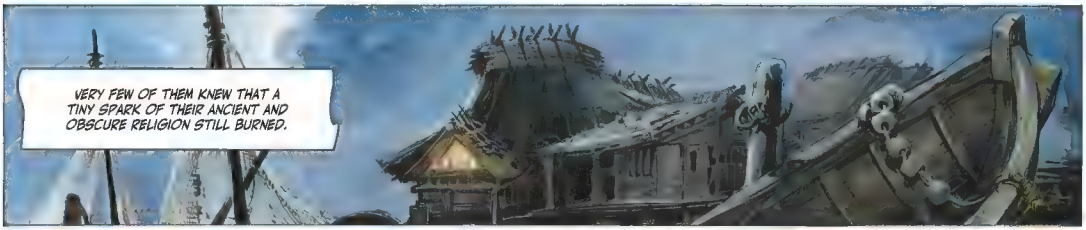
YOU NEVER RAN THIS TOWN, AND NEVER WILL!
HA HA! MAYBE NOW HE'LL QUIT SHOWING OFF.
MMFF!

YOU REALLY *DO* HAVE THE STRENGTH AND THE COURAGE OF AN ONI! MY NAME'S GUON AND THAT'S EIJI – HE NEVER SPEAKS. CONSIDER US YOUR FRIENDS... FROM HERE ON OUT, YOU CAN COUNT ON US...*TO COUNT ON YOU!*

HA HA HA!
HA HA HA!


YOU CAN TAKE THAT MASK OFF NOW, SHINNOSUKE. WHERE'D YOU FIND IT, ANYWAY?
HOW DID YOU KNOW IT WAS ME?
YOUR VOICE, SILLY. I KNOW MY BIG BROTHER'S VOICE.
HEH HEH. DID YOU SEE HIM RUN?
THIS IS GOING TO MEAN TROUBLE FOR ME.
MIKIKO... I'LL ALWAYS PROTECT YOU.
I'M READY NOW. I WANT TO BE ACCEPTED INTO A DOJO AND BECOME AN UNBEATABLE SAMURAI!
NO DOJO WILL EVER HAVE YOU, SHINNOSUKE. WE HAVE NO HONOR. WE'RE NOTHING BUT HININ SLAVES.
WE'RE DESPISED, YES. BUT IT IS WE WHO WHO PERFORM THE MOST HUMBLE OF TASKS.
WITHOUT THE HININ, NONE OF THOSE SO-CALLED "RESPECTABLE" PEOPLE COULD EVEN LACE UP THEIR WARAJIS.
THERE'S HONOR IN THAT, AS WELL.
YOU'RE RIGHT, SHINNOSUKE. THERE IS HONOR IN THAT.

HININ, "NON-HUMAN." A WORD FOREVER ASSOCIATED WITH THE HIRUKOTE, A FALLEN PEOPLE; A WORD THAT FILLED WHOEVER HEARD IT WITH CONTEMPT.
DISPOSSESSED OF THEIR LAND AND CONFINED TO THE MOST HUMBLE OF TRADES, A FEW RARE HININ HAD SURVIVED BY COMING TOGETHER IN THE SMALL VILLAGE OF OSE.


VERY FEW OF THEM KNEW THAT A TINY SPARK OF THEIR ANCIENT AND OBSCURE RELIGION STILL BURNED.

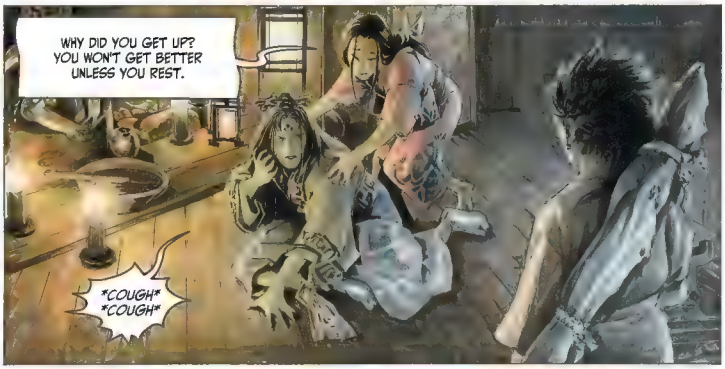
A GLOWING SPARK THAT COULD HAVE BROUGHT THE SEA ITSELF TO BOIL.

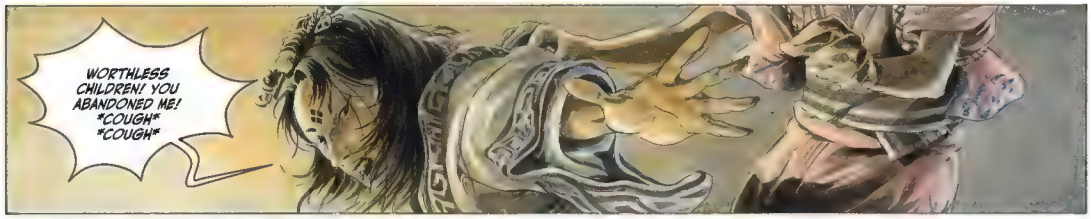
HIRUKO NO KAMI.

COUGH *COUGH*

NOBU KIRUKOTE, THE LAST MIKKYO PRIESTESS OF HIRUKO, THE LEECH-CHILD DEITY.

MOTHER!


WHY DID YOU GET UP? YOU WON'T GET BETTER UNLESS YOU REST.
COUGH *COUGH*

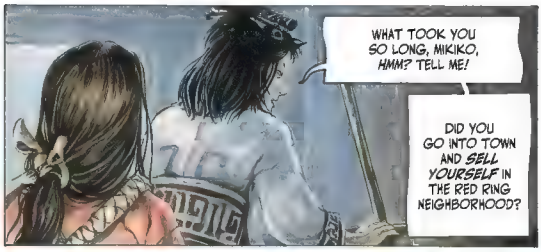

WORTHLESS CHILDREN! YOU ABANDONED ME! *COUGH* *COUGH*

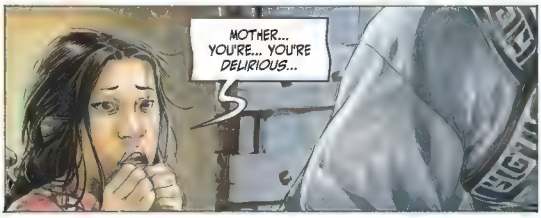
MOTHER, YOU CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS. YOU'RE WEAK AND YOU NEED *REAL* MEDICAL CARE.

FOOL! THE HIRUKOTE CLAN HAS ALWAYS FOUND ITS OWN REMEDIES. BESIDES, EVERYBODY KNOWS...

...PEOPLE SEE US AS HININ. A DOCTOR WOULD BE *AFRAID* TO BE INFECTED BY OUR *FILTH.*

BUT I CAN HEAL MYSELF WITH MY RITUALS... *COUGH* *COUGH*
...IF YOU WOULD JUST LET ME PERFORM THEM!


WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG, MIKIKO, HMM? TELL ME!
DID YOU GO INTO TOWN AND SELL YOURSELF IN THE RED RING NEIGHBORHOOD?

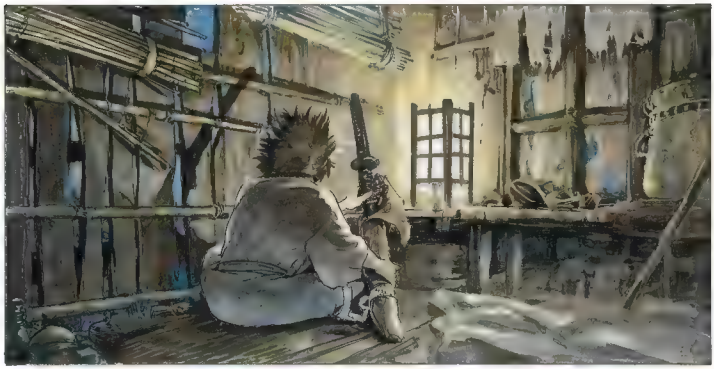

MOTHER... YOU'RE... YOU'RE DELIRIOUS...

SHUT UP AND GET THE WATER READY. I'LL NEED A NICE HOT BATH.

WHY ARE YOU JUST STANDING THERE, SHINNOSUKE?!

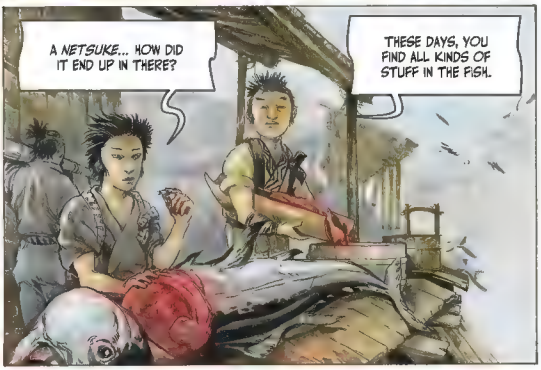
GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, OR I'LL SKEWER YOU WITH A NAIL FROM THIS STATUE!

YOU MIGHT ACTUALLY BE USEFUL TO ME LIKE THAT!



...THE STRENGTH AND THE COURAGE OF AN ONI.

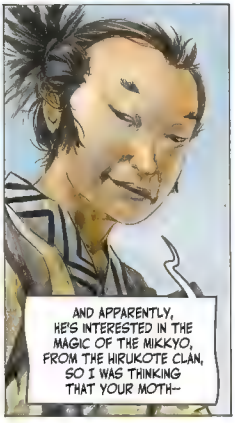
Tock


A NETSUKE... HOW DID IT END UP IN THERE?
THESE DAYS, YOU FIND ALL KINDS OF STUFF IN THE FISH.

THE SOLDIERS THREW MOST OF THE BODIES IN THE SEA.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, KONDO?

FROM THE FUDOKAWA BATTLE. KYODEN FUJIWARA WAS DEFEATED BY HIS BROTHER, TOTEKU, WHO IS NOW THE NEW SHOGUN.

YOU KNOW, THINGS MIGHT START TO GET BETTER FOR US HININ.
TOTEKU FUJIWARA SENT A DOCTOR TO THE VILLAGE. A REAL ONE!


AND APPARENTLY, HE'S INTERESTED IN THE MAGIC OF THE MIKKYO, FROM THE HIRUKOTE CLAN, SO I WAS THINKING THAT YOUR MOTH–

DON'T YOU TALK ABOUT MY MOTHER, KONDO! OR THAT STUPID MAGIC OF HERS!

YOU KNOW... I WAS THINKING WE COULD GO SNOOPING AROUND TOMORROW.
WHERE? IN THE VILLAGE OF FUDOKAWA? THERE'S ALMOST NOTHING LEFT.

WHAT?

YOU JERK! YOU WENT THERE WITHOUT ME?!

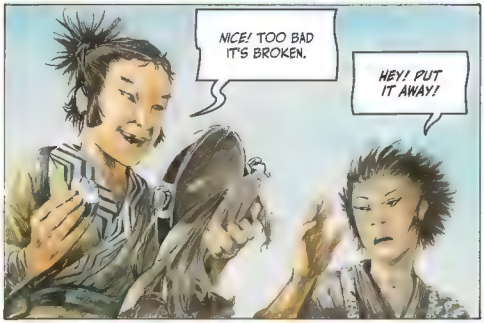
PLENTY MORE WHERE IT CAME FROM! HA HA!

HA HA! STOP! YOU'RE RUINING THE FISH!

CAREFUL, THE MISO'S VERY HOT.
ALRIGHT, THANK YOU.

KONDO!

WHERE DID YOU GO?
I WENT TO GET THE OBJECT I FOUND IN THE VILLAGE OF FUDOKAWA.

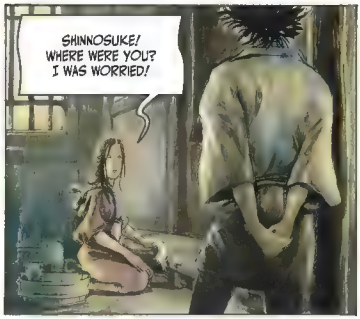

NICE! TOO BAD IT'S BROKEN.
HEY! PUT IT AWAY!

WHAT? WHY?
I DON'T WANT ANYONE TO SEE IT.

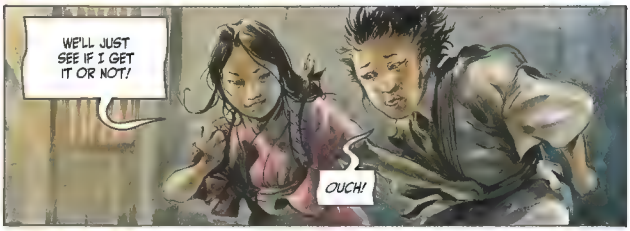
HMM... I CAN TRY TO FIX IT, IF YOU WANT. MY FATHER TAUGHT ME HOW TO MAKE VASES. THIS PROBABLY WON'T BE THAT DIFFERENT.

FIX IT? SURE, WHY NOT? ... BUT BRING IT BACK SOON.

SIGH WHEN WILL YOU FINALLY START TRUSTING ME, SHINNOSUKE?
I WOULDN'T HOLD MY BREATH.


SHINNOSUKE! WHERE WERE YOU? I WAS WORRIED!

I BET YOU WERE HANGING OUT WITH THAT STUPID KONDO AGAIN.
JUST FOR THAT, YOU'RE NOT GETTING THE PRESENT I BROUGHT YOU.

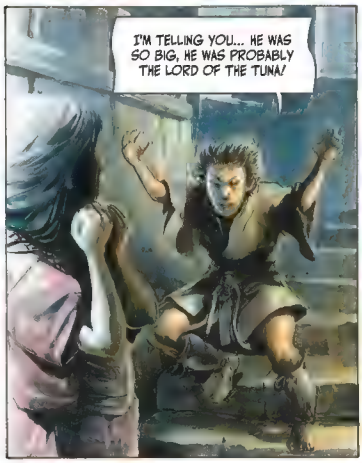

WE'LL JUST SEE IF I GET IT OR NOT!
OUCH!

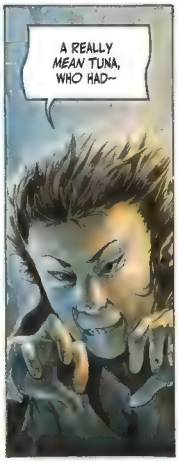
OW! THAT REALLY HURT, MIKIKO. WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?
I'M SORRY, SHINNOSUKE! I DIDN'T MEANT TO! I WASN'T~

HA HA! GOTCHA! HERE, TAKE IT. IT'S YOURS.

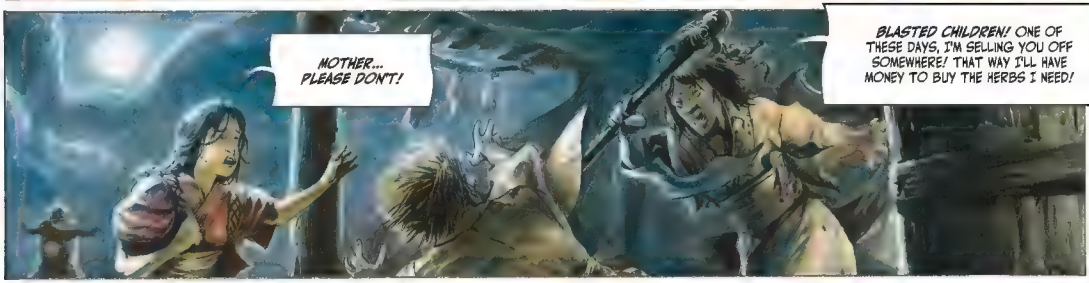
A NETSUKE! YOU'RE SO SILLY SOMETIMES!
I FOUND IT INSIDE A BIG FISH, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT?!

IT'S BEAUTIFUL! HOW DID IT END UP IN THERE?


I'M TELLING YOU... HE WAS SO BIG, HE WAS PROBABLY THE LORD OF THE TUNA!


A REALLY MEAN TUNA, WHO HAD--

WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING?
COUCH *COUGH* STANDING AROUND DOING NOTHING WHILE YOUR MOTHER'S DYING?!

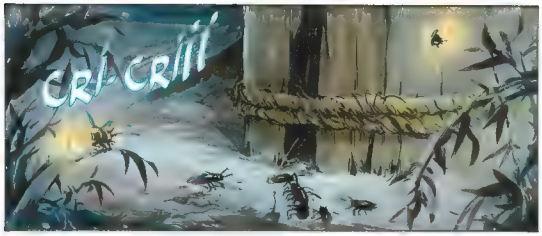

MOTHER... PLEASE DON'T!
BLASTED CHILDREN! ONE OF THESE DAYS, I'M SELLING YOU OFF SOMEWHERE! THAT WAY I'LL HAVE MONEY TO BUY THE HERBS I NEED!

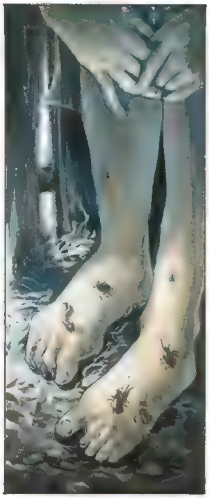
AND WHAT'S THAT DISGUSTING SMELL, SHINNOSUKE? DID YOU GO WORK AT THE FISH MARKET AGAIN?

THOSE PEOPLE RENOUNCED THE HIRUKOTE NAME!! YOU'VE BECOME A STUPID HININ, JUST LIKE THEM!

GET OVER HERE! YOU'RE SLEEPING IN THE BARREL TONIGHT! I DON'T WANT THAT STENCH AROUND ME!

CRI-CRI
CRIII


CRI-CRIII

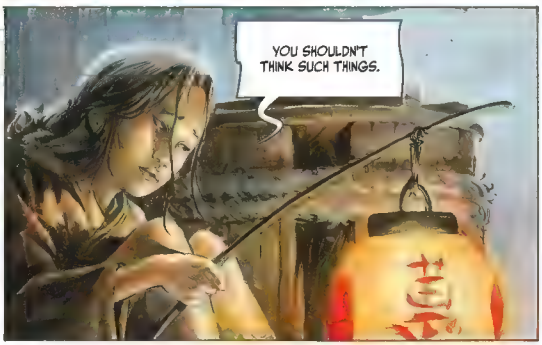


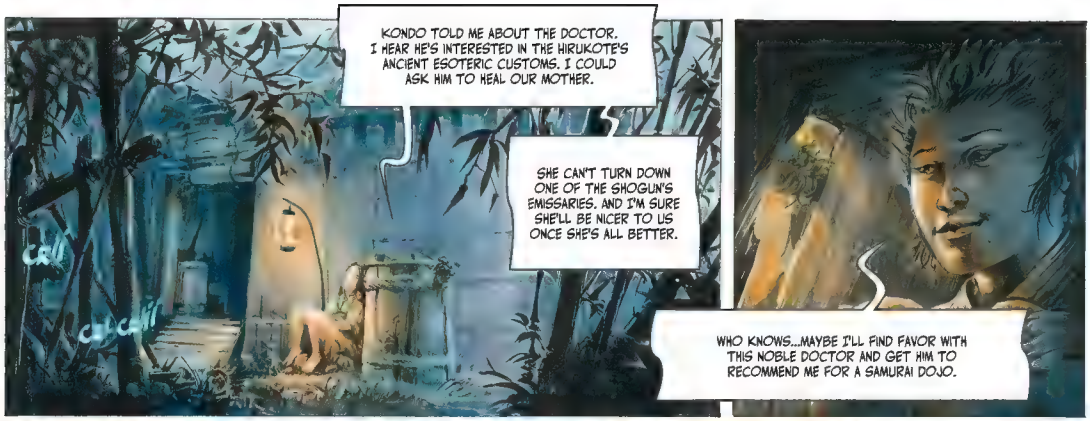
SHINNOSUKE...

MIKIKO? IS THAT YOU?
YES, BIG BROTHER.

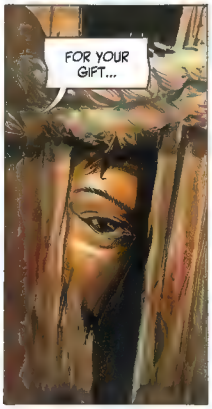
GO AWAY! IF MOTHER CATCHES YOU, SHE'LL MAKE YOU SLEEP IN THE BARREL, TOO!
DON'T WORRY. HER ILLNESS MAKES HER SAY ALL THOSE MEAN THINGS, BUT IT ALSO MAKES HER TIRED, AND SHE'S SOUND ASLEEP RIGHT NOW.

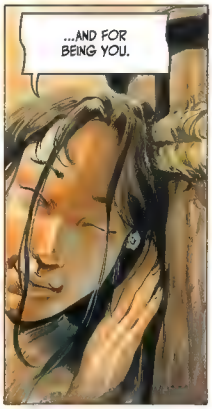
SOMETIMES... I DREAM THAT I KILL HER WITH A KATANA.
SHINNOSUKE! HOW COULD YOU? SHE'S OUR MOTHER!


YOU SHOULDN'T THINK SUCH THINGS.

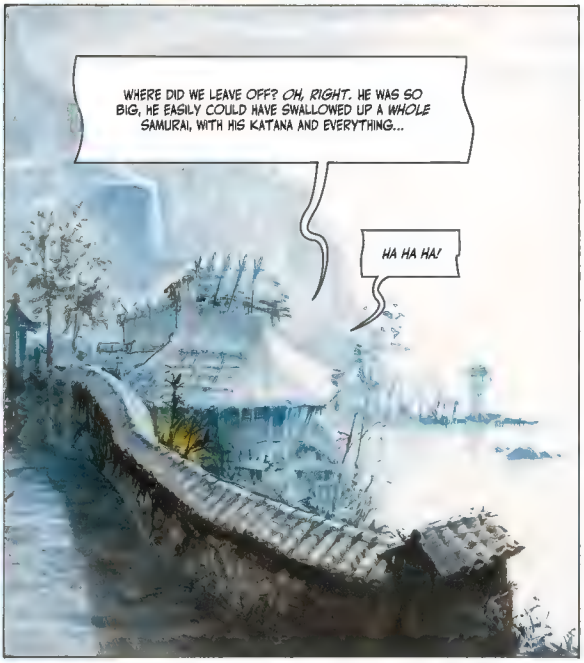

KONDO TOLD ME ABOUT THE DOCTOR. I HEAR HE'S INTERESTED IN THE HIRUKOTE'S ANCIENT ESOTERIC CUSTOMS. I COULD ASK HIM TO HEAL OUR MOTHER.
SHE CAN'T TURN DOWN ONE OF THE SHOGUN'S EMISSARIES. AND I'M SURE SHE'LL BE NICER TO US ONCE SHE'S ALL BETTER.
WHO KNOWS...MAYBE I'LL FIND FAVOR WITH THIS NOBLE DOCTOR AND GET HIM TO RECOMMEND ME FOR A SAMURAI DOJO.

THANKS, SHINNOSUKE.
FOR WHAT?


FOR YOUR GIFT...


...AND FOR BEING YOU.

OKAY, WELL, SINCE YOU *INSIST* ON SPENDING THE NIGHT HERE WITH ME, I HAVE TIME TO FINISH THE STORY ABOUT THE BIG TUNA!
OH, NOOO...

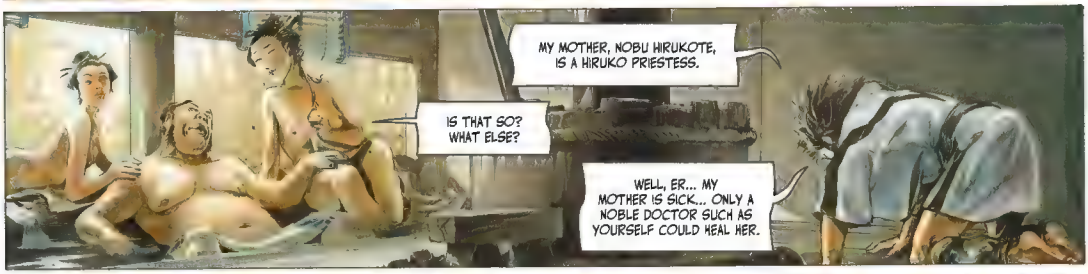

WHERE DID WE LEAVE OFF? *OH, RIGHT*. HE WAS SO BIG, HE EASILY COULD HAVE SWALLOWED UP A *WHOLE* SAMURAI, WITH HIS KATANA AND EVERYTHING...
HA HA HA!

SHINNOSUKE, YOU KNOW HININ AREN'T ALLOWED IN THE ONSEN.
I DIDN'T COME FOR A BATH, SHIMATA. I MUST SPEAK WITH THE NEW DOCTOR. I WAS TOLD I'D FIND HIM HERE.
WELL... OKAY, THEN, BUT DON'T GO IN THE WATER, YOU'LL SCARE ALL MY GUESTS AWAY.
ALL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIAL CASTES VANISHED IN THE ONSEN.
A SHOPKEEPER COULD BATHE NEXT TO A SAMURAI WITHOUT ABIDING BY THE RULES OF PROPER ETIQUETTE.
BUT IT WAS DIFFERENT FOR THE HININ: THEY WERE ONLY ALLOWED IN AS SERVANTS.
THE WARM BATHS WERE SCENTED WITH FRAGRANT HERBS, BUT BECAUSE OF THE HUMIDITY, ONE POORLY CONCEALED ODOR STILL MANAGED TO MAKE ITS WAY TO SHINNOSUKE'S NOSTRILS.
AN ODOR OF RANK, ACID PERSPIRATION.
THE ODOR OF A MAN WHO DIDN'T WASH BEFORE DIPPING HIS BODY INTO THE COMMUNAL POOLS.
THAT WAS JUST A FORETASTE OF THE PERSON SHINNOSUKE NOW STOOD BEFORE.

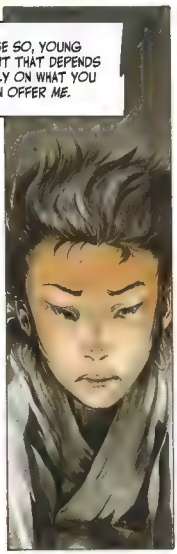
KAIZEN MOREBITO, THE DOCTOR.
COME IN. THEY TOLD ME YOU WERE COMING.

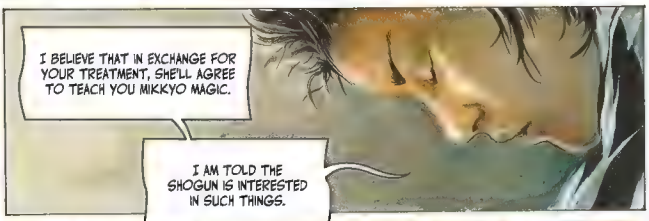
WHAT'S YOUR NAME, YOUNG HININ?
I... MY NAME IS SHINNOSUKE, MY LORD, AND I AM WITH THE HIRUKOTE CLAN.

INTERESTING CLAN NAME... WHY ARE YOU DISTURBING ME?


MY MOTHER, NOBU HIRUKOTE, IS A HIRUKO PRIESTESS.
IS THAT SO? WHAT ELSE?
WELL, ER... MY MOTHER IS SICK... ONLY A NOBLE DOCTOR SUCH AS YOURSELF COULD HEAL HER.

MAYBE SO, YOUNG HININ, BUT THAT DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON WHAT YOU CAN OFFER ME.




I BELIEVE THAT IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR TREATMENT, SHE'LL AGREE TO TEACH YOU MIKKYO MAGIC.
I AM TOLD THE SHOGUN IS INTERESTED IN SUCH THINGS.

HMM... WHAT YOU SAY IS NOT WITHOUT MERIT.

FATHER, WHAT IS THIS BEGGAR DOING HERE?
AH, HERE'S MY SON, MOKAI.
YOU TOLD ME WE WOULD BE ALONE WITH THESE WOMEN, FATHER.
IS HE HERE TO JOIN THE PARTY? HE LOOKS A LITTLE UPTIGHT, AND NOT QUITE DEFLOWERED.
I... I... I WOULDN'T DREAM OF IMPOSING, MY LORD.
I BELIEVE YOU. YOU COULDN'T EVEN TELL I WAS JOKING.
ENOUGH, SON. GET OVER HERE. I DIDN'T BUY THESE WOMEN FOR THE WHOLE DAY.
NOW LEAVE US, BOY. YOU CAN TELL YOUR MOTHER I'LL HONOR HER WITH MY VISIT TOMORROW.
MAKE SURE THE PLACE IS CLEAN AND WORTHY OF RECEIVING PEOPLE OF OUR STANDING.
THANK YOU, MY LORD. WE... WE CERTAINLY WILL.
TLACK

HOW DID IT GO, SHINNOSUKE?
HMM... HE WAS ALL PALE, LIKE HE JUST SAW A SHINIGAMI. MEH, MUST BE THE HEAT.
FINE, SHIMATA. SORRY, I MUST GO!
I HAD THE MASK ON. THERE'S NO WAY HE RECOGNIZED ME.
SHINNOSUKE HAD ACCOMPLISHED ONE OF HIS GOALS, YET HE WAS UNABLE TO REJOICE OVER IT.
IF MOKAI HAD RECOGNIZED HIM, ALL HIS PLANS WOULD WASH AWAY, LIKE SAND WHEN THE TIDE ROLLS IN.
THAT RANK, VILE ODOR OF SWEAT WASN'T GOING TO RELINQUISH HIM THAT EASILY.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU INSISTED ON COMING TOO, MOKIA. SUBOTAI IS THE ONLY ESCORT I NEED.
FORGIVE ME FOR NOT TELLING YOU SOONER, FATHER, BUT I FOUND OUT THE WOMAN YOU'RE GOING TO SEE HAS A DAUGHTER NAMED MIKIKO.
THAT'S THE HININ GIRL RESPONSIBLE FOR MY NEW LOOK.
DO NOT WORRY, SON. IF WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIRUKOTE MAGIC IS TRUE, WE'LL FIND A WAY TO GIVE YOU A FACE THAT'S EVEN MORE HANDSOME THAN THE ORIGINAL.
WORST CASE SCENARIO... WE NOW HAVE LEVERAGE AND CAN MAKE THE HIRUKOTE PRIESTESS BEND TO OUR WILL.
MOREBITO-SAMA, WE ARE VERY HONORED TO WELCOME YOU TO OUR--
IT'S NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, LITTLE MIKIKO.

SO YOU AGREE TO TREAT ME, AND IN RETURN, I WILL USE MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE DARK ARTS IN THE SERVICE OF SHOGUN TOTEKU FUJIWARA.
I ASSUME YOU KNOW I WAS NOT IN FAVOR OF THIS MEETING.
YES, I AM AWARE OF YOUR RETICENCE TOWARDS THE SHOGUN'S DOCTORS. THAT MATTERS NOT, PRIESTESS NOBU.
MMM, I THINK WE CAN FINALLY ENJOY THIS FRAGRANT TEA.
I BELIEVE OUR AGREEMENT WILL WORK TO YOUR ADVANTAGE, AS I CAN PERSONALLY ADD A *CONSIDERABLE* AMOUNT OF RYOS TO IT.
I HAVE TO SAY, YOU'VE PINPOINTED THE PROBLEM, NOBLE KAIZEN.
I'M HAPPY TO HEAR THAT.

I PROPOSE WE CELEBRATE, BUT FIRST... WHERE IS YOUR SON?
HE'S THE ONE TO WHOM WE OWE THIS AGREEMENT.
DID YOU KNOW THAT BEFORE WE EVEN MET YOUR SON, MOKAI RAN INTO YOUR ADORABLE DAUGHTER MIKIKO?
FATHER, I CAN HAZARD A GUESS AND SAY I MET THEM *BOTH*, TOGETHER... BUT I'M NOT POSITIVE.
MIKIKO? *WHEN?*
YES... YES, MOTHER.
BUT PLEASE, I DON'T WISH TO DISTURB YOU AND YOUR GUESTS.
YOU'RE JUST SHY, THAT'S ALL. COME *CLOSER*.
I'M HOME, MOTHER. I JUST GOT BACK FROM THE MARKET.

KAIZEN-SAMA, IT'S AN HONOR TO HAVE YOU.

WON'T YOU JOIN US? YOUR SISTER WAS JUST ABOUT TO TELL US HOW SHE MET MOKAI.
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I--

HEY MORON!!

I DID IT, SHINNOSUKE! I FIXED IT!

OH! I'M SORRY... I DIDN'T REALIZE--

KONDO! I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS! BEAT IT!

NO, NO. FRIENDS OF SHINNOSUKE-SAN ARE FRIENDS OF OURS, FROM NOW ON.

I'M CURIOUS AS TO WHAT YOU MANAGED TO FIX. PERHAPS YOUR SKILLS CAN BE OF USE TO MY FAMILY.
NO, REALLY, I--

SO THIS IS WHAT YOU WERE HIDING! I KNEW IT WAS YOU, YOU DISGUSTING VERMIN!

WHAT'S GOING ON, SHINNOSUKE? WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS MASK?
YOU'LL PAY FOR WHAT YOU DID!

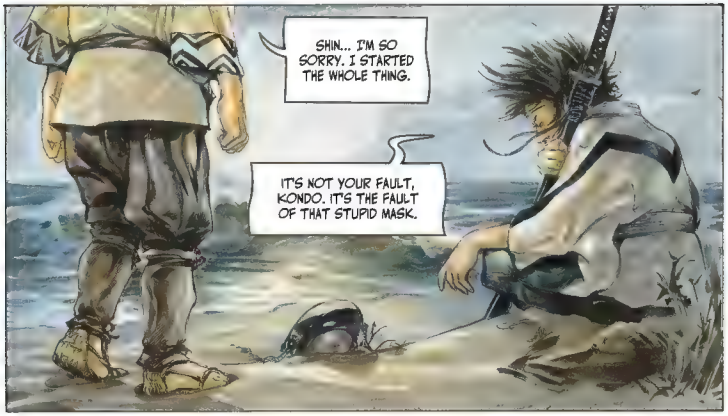
FOR MIKIKO, I WOULD DO IT AGAIN, YOU PIG! A THOUSAND TIMES!

GET HIM, SUBOTAI! I WANT HIS HEAD!

SHINNOSUKE...

I... I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
YOUR SON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MOKAI'S DISFIGUREMENT.
A HORRIFIC DEED, WHICH HE ACCOMPLISHED FROM BEHIND THAT TASTELESS MASK.
SHINNOSUKE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A LITTLE RUFFIAN! I SHOULD'VE DROWNED HIM WHEN HE WAS A BABY... *COUGH* *COUGH*
MOTHER!
DON'T YOU WORRY, THIS UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT WON'T CANCEL OUR DEAL... ON THE CONTRARY.
UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, WE FIND OURSELVES IN A DELICATE SITUATION. BUT IT'S LUCKY YOUR DAUGHTER IS SO FETCHING.
MY IMPETUOUS YOUNG MOKAI IS STILL ALL SHOOK UP OVER HER.
SHE'S ALL HE EVER TALKS ABOUT. NOTHING ELSE MATTERS.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
THAT WE SHOULD ADD ONE SMALL CLAUSE...

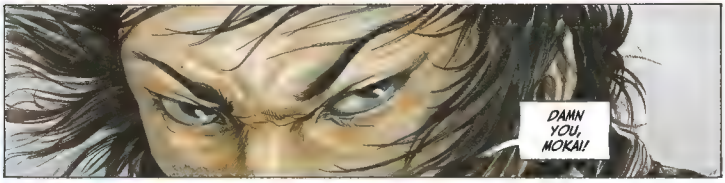
SHINNOSUKE SPENT THAT NIGHT ON THE BEACH. HE WAS UNABLE TO SLEEP, THOUGH WHAT HE WANTED MOST WAS TO ESCAPE INTO HIS DREAMS.
HE THREW THE MASK AWAY, NAIVELY THINKING THAT THE CURSE WOULD BE LIFTED...
...AND THAT THINGS WOULD RETURN TO NORMAL.
BUT HE COULDN'T FIND IT IN HIMSELF TO WALK MORE THAN A FEW STEPS AWAY.
SHINNOSUKE!


SHIN... I'M SO SORRY. I STARTED THE WHOLE THING.
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, KONDO. IT'S THE FAULT OF THAT STUPID MASK.

WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO? RUN AWAY FOREVER?
THAT WOULD BE BEST. I DON'T WANT MY CURSE TO FALL ON THE REST OF YOU... ESPECIALLY NOT MIKIKO.

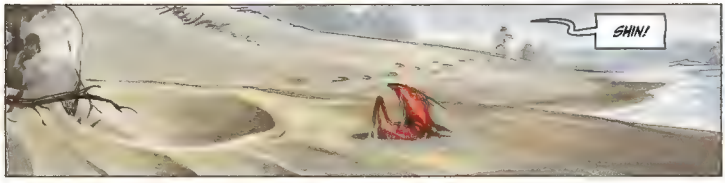
BEST FOR *US*? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?! I HAD TO RUN AWAY TOO – THEY THINK I'M YOUR *ACCOMPLICE*! AS FOR MIKIKO, WELL...

MIKIKO?! WHAT ABOUT MIKIKO?!!
SHE... YOUR MOTHER LET THEM TAKE HER AWAY. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY INTEND TO DO WITH HER–

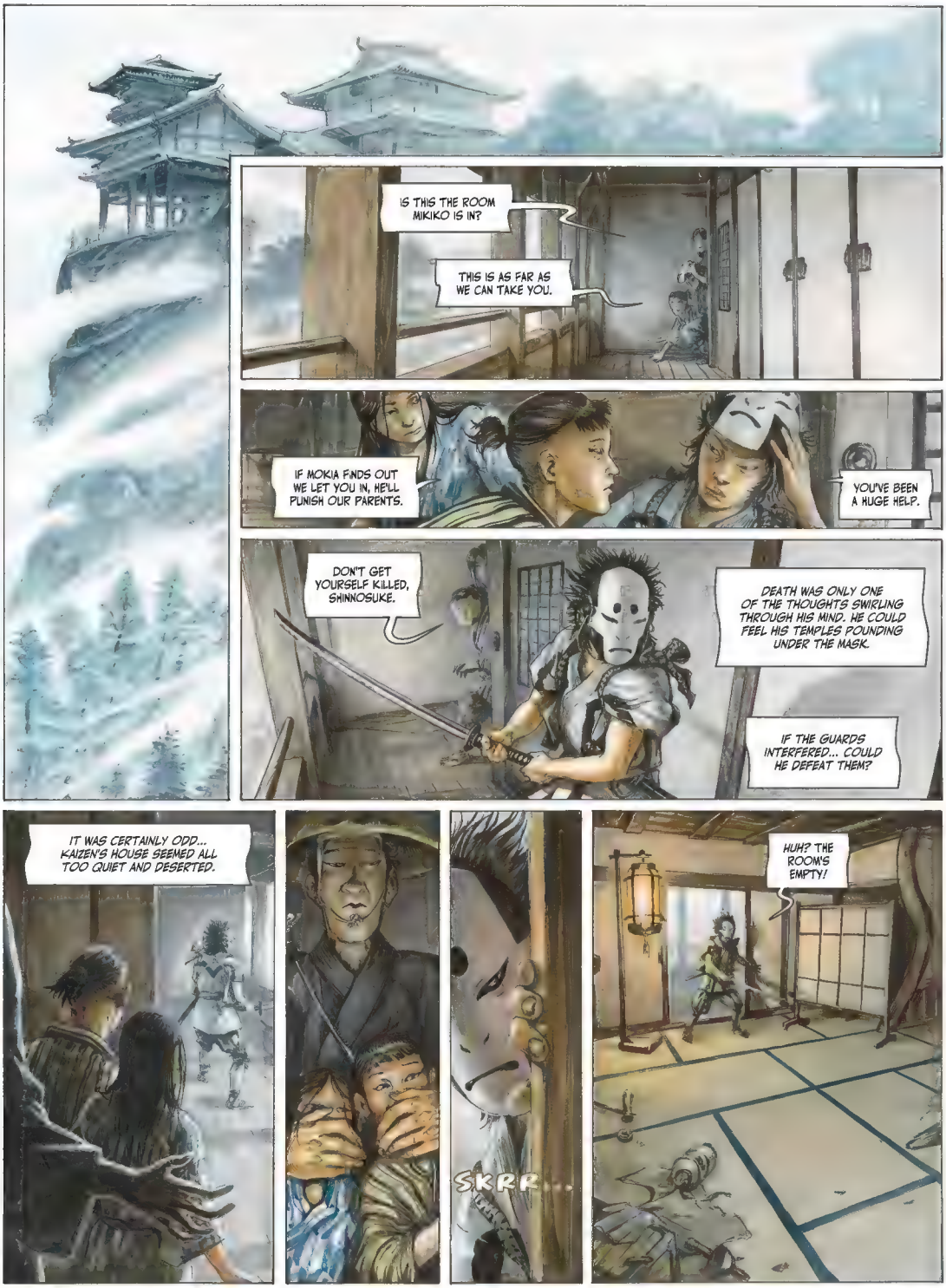

DAMN YOU, MOKAI!

I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THEY *INTEND!* I'VE GOT TO TURN MYSELF IN.

SHIN... WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? TELL ME!


SHIN!

SHIN, NO... THEY'LL KILL YOU!
TONK!
TONK
IT'S ALL MY FAULT, KONDO. I'M THE ONE MOKAI WANTS. ONCE THEY HAVE ME, THEY'LL LET MIKIKO GO.
RUN. I DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO HAPPEN TO YOU.
YOU'RE SUCH AN IDIOT, SHIN!
TONK!
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
EIJI! GUON! YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW HAPPY I AM TO SEE YOU. THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!
WE DON'T KNOW YOU! SPEAK OR GO AWAY, YOU FOOL. OTHERWISE, WE'LL CALL THE GUARDS!
NOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE ME? I AM THE BOY ONI AND I DEMAND REVENGE!

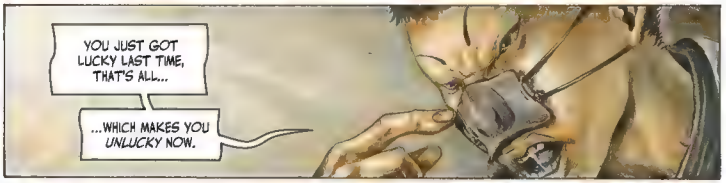

IS THIS THE ROOM MIKIKO IS IN?
THIS IS AS FAR AS WE CAN TAKE YOU.
IF MOKIA FINDS OUT WE LET YOU IN, HE'LL PUNISH OUR PARENTS.
YOU'VE BEEN A HUGE HELP.
DON'T GET YOURSELF KILLED, SHINNOSUKE.
DEATH WAS ONLY ONE OF THE THOUGHTS SWIRLING THROUGH HIS MIND. HE COULD FEEL HIS TEMPLES POUNDING UNDER THE MASK.
IF THE GUARDS INTERFERED... COULD HE DEFEAT THEM?
IT WAS CERTAINLY ODD... KAIZEN'S HOUSE SEEMED ALL TOO QUIET AND DESERTED.
SKRR...
HUH? THE ROOM'S EMPTY!

KIJAA!!

SHINNOSUKE! I KNEW YOU'D COME FOR YOUR SISTER!
DAMN YOU, MOKAI! WHERE IS MIKIKO?!!
YOU'RE TOO LATE, MY FATHER TOOK HER AWAY WITH HIM.
I ONLY STAYED BEHIND TO GET MY REVENGE.

AAARRGH! I'LL KILL YOU!

AND YOU CALL YOURSELF AN ONI? COMBAT IS AN ART ONLY FEW HAVE ACCESS TO. AND YOU'RE JUST A HININ BEGGAR!


YOU JUST GOT LUCKY LAST TIME, THAT'S ALL...
...WHICH MAKES YOU UNLUCKY NOW.

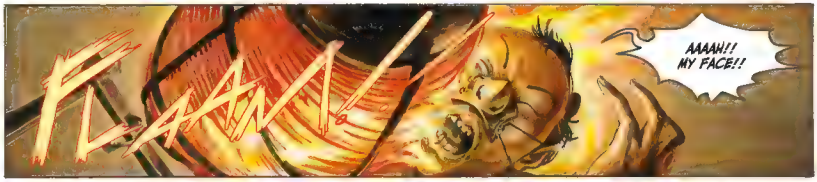
NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF YOU HADN'T BUTTED IN!
YOU AND YOUR STUPID MASK!

I'M THE ONE WHO TOLD EIJI AND GUON TO LET YOU IN. GET OVER HERE, SUBOTA!

FORGIVE US, SHINNOSUKE... WE HAD NO IDEA!

I'LL TAKE THREE PAYBACKS IN ONE FELL SWOOP.

KIYAAA!!


FLAAN!
AAAAH!! MY FACE!!

NOW, SHINNOSUKE!
UHRRG!!
KONDO!!

HE'S DEAD!!
HEY! WHERE DID MOKAI GO?

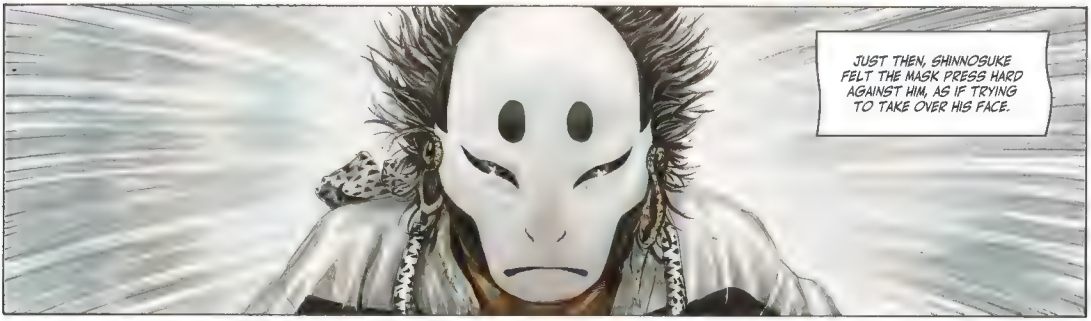
SHINNOSUKE! A TRUE WARRIOR DOESN'T REQUIRE THE HELP OF BEGGARS!
COME OUT AND FACE ME ON YOUR OWN!

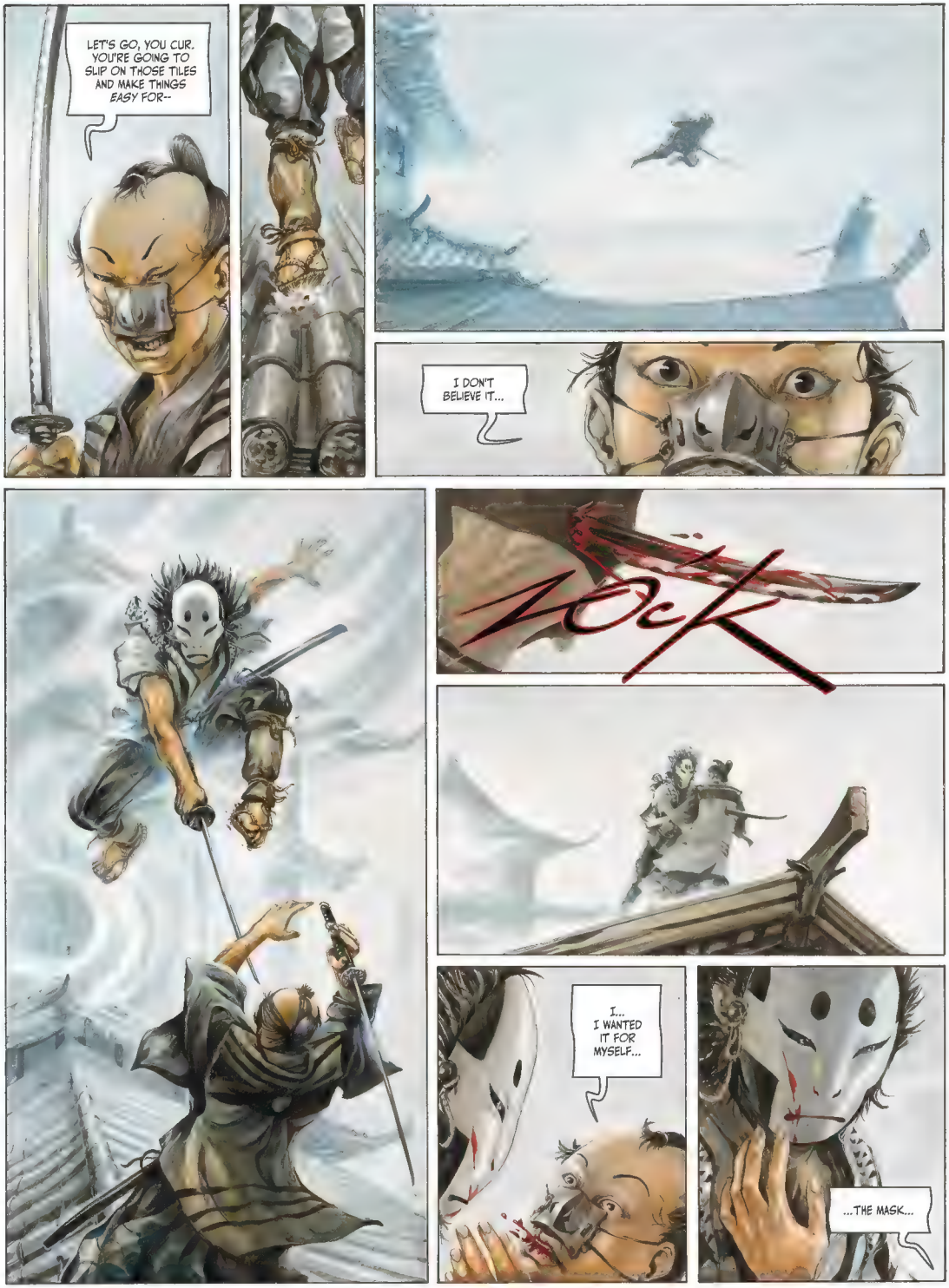
THERE HE IS! ON THE ROOF!
LET'S ALL GO AT HIM TOGETHER!
NO!

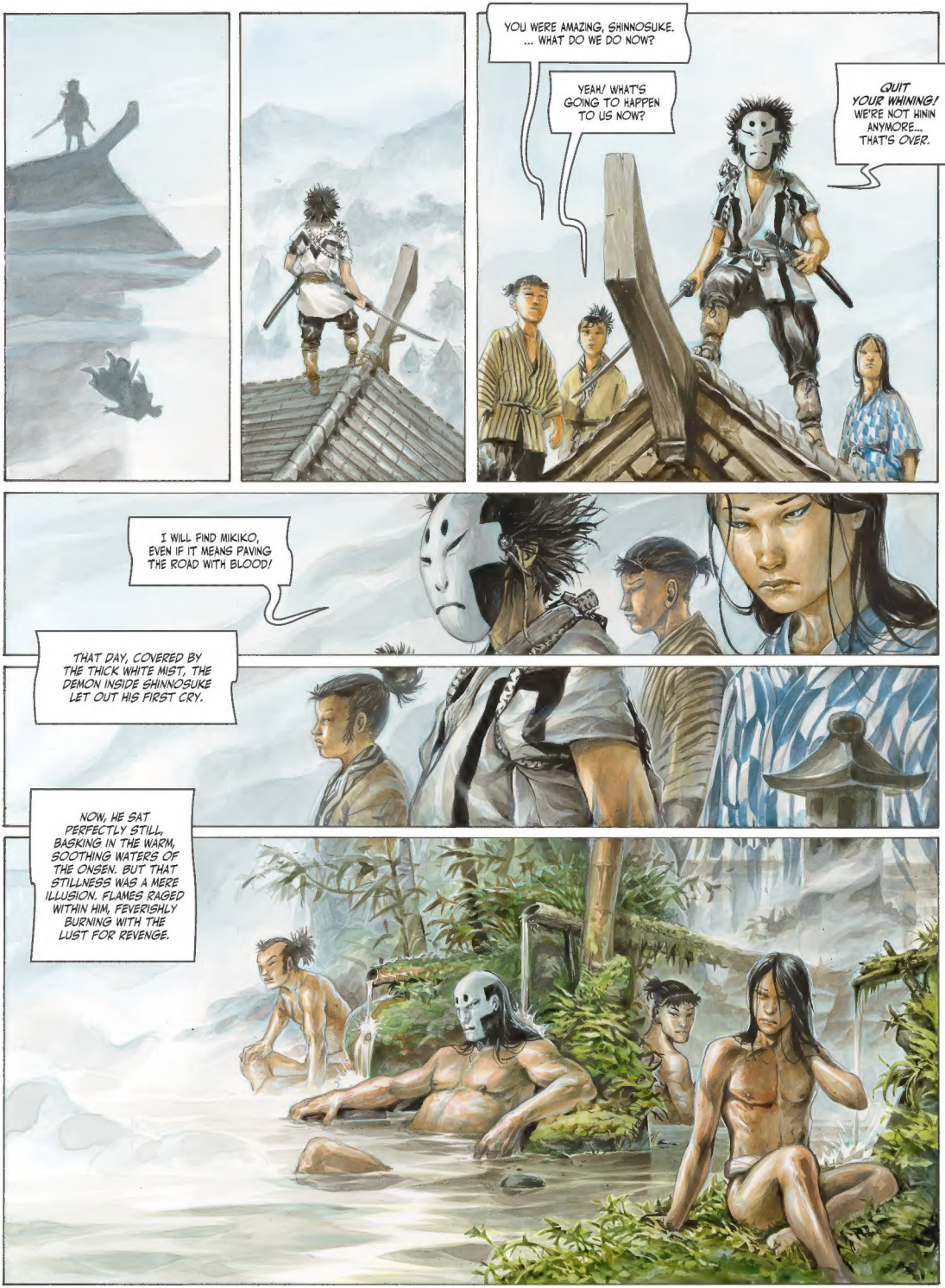
I MUST DO THIS ALONE.
BUT... SHINNOSUKE! YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE A KATANA! HE'LL KILL YOU!

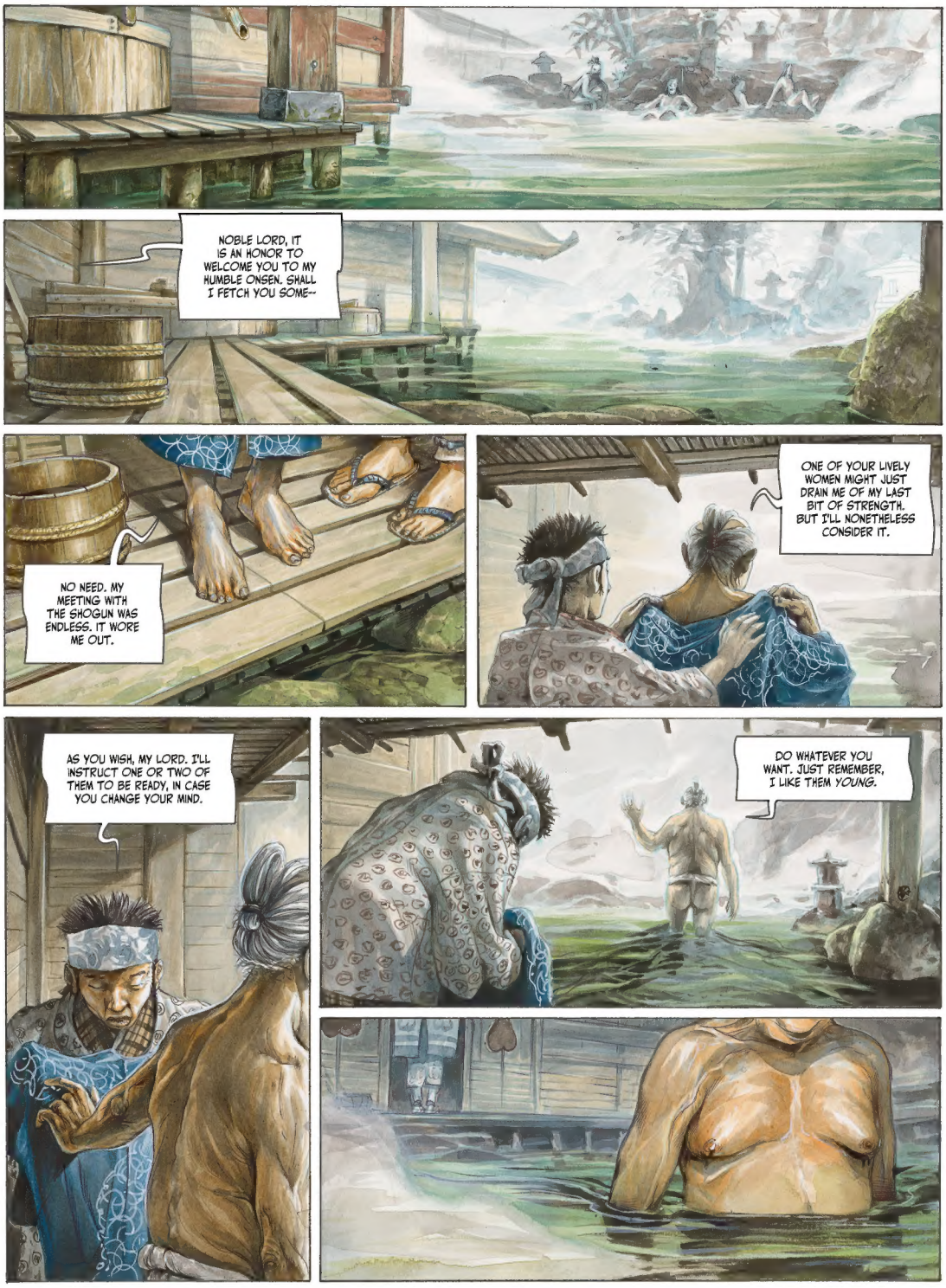
SHINNOSUKE! THERE IS ONE THING I CAN TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR SISTER MIKIKO!
JUST BEFORE MY FATHER TOOK HER AWAY...

...SHE WAS SQUEALING LIKE A PIG, BUT SHE WAS SOAKING WET WHEN I SCREWED HER!


JUST THEN, SHINNOSUKE FELT THE MASK PRESS HARD AGAINST HIM, AS IF TRYING TO TAKE OVER HIS FACE.


LET'S GO, YOU CUR. YOU'RE GOING TO SLIP ON THOSE TILES AND MAKE THINGS EASY FOR--
I DON'T BELIEVE IT...
ZOCK
I... I WANTED IT FOR MYSELF...
...THE MASK...


YOU WERE AMAZING, SHINNOSUKE. ... WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
YEAH! WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO US NOW?
QUIT YOUR WHINING! WE'RE NOT HININ ANYMORE... THAT'S OVER.
I WILL FIND MIKIKO, EVEN IF IT MEANS PAVING THE ROAD WITH BLOOD!
THAT DAY, COVERED BY THE THICK WHITE MIST, THE DEMON INSIDE SHINNOSUKE LET OUT HIS FIRST CRY.
NOW, HE SAT PERFECTLY STILL, BASKING IN THE WARM, SOOTHING WATERS OF THE ONSEN. BUT THAT STILLNESS WAS A MERE ILLUSION. FLAMES RAGED WITHIN HIM, FEVERISHLY BURNING WITH THE LUST FOR REVENGE.


NOBLE LORD, IT IS AN HONOR TO WELCOME YOU TO MY HUMBLE ONSEN. SHALL I FETCH YOU SOME--
NO NEED. MY MEETING WITH THE SHOGUN WAS ENDLESS. IT WORE ME OUT.
ONE OF YOUR LIVELY WOMEN MIGHT JUST DRAIN ME OF MY LAST BIT OF STRENGTH. BUT I'LL NONETHELESS CONSIDER IT.
AS YOU WISH, MY LORD. I'LL INSTRUCT ONE OR TWO OF THEM TO BE READY, IN CASE YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND.
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT. JUST REMEMBER, I LIKE THEM YOUNG.

WHO'S THERE?! I SAID I DIDN'T WANT TO BE DISTURBED!

GO AWAY AT ONCE. DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?!

I'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN YOUR PUTRID STENCH, KAIZEN MOREBITO!